

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR APPROVES SPRING CREEK SURFACE MINE PLAN IN MONTANA

Spring Creek, Montana, will be the site of a 3,632-acre surface mine expected to yield 184 million tons of coal by the year 2004, the Interior Department announced today.

The mining and reclamation plan, approved by Interior Assistant Secretary for Energy and Minerals Joan M. Davenport, calls for coal production to start in 1980 and reach seven million tons per year by 1982. The operation is planned to continue for 25 years.

The new mine will be developed by the Spring Creek Coal Company, a subsidiary of Northern Energy Resources Company of Portland, Oregon. The mine will be located at the Spring Creek site in Big Horn County, Montana, about 26 miles northwest of Sheridan, Wyoming.

"Production from this mine will help to ease the Nation's dependence on foreign oil," Secretary Davenport said. "Federal and State reclamation standards resulting from the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 require that the operations be environmentally sound and that the land surface be restored to productive condition."

The mine plan permit area includes federally-owned surface and coal, state-owned surface, and privately-owned surface area. Of the 3,632 acres in the permit area, 3,068 acres would be disturbed by mining and associated operations. The federal lease covers 2,347 acres and was issued in 1965 after a competitive sale.

Coal will be removed by truck-shovel and by electric dragline methods. The coal will be shipped by rail to Utility Fuels, Inc., in Houston, Texas, for use in steam electric generating plants.

Secretary Davenport said the mining and reclamation plans were reviewed and recommended with environmental stipulations by the Office of Surface Mining, Bureau of Land Management, Geological Survey and the Fish and Wildlife Service, all Interior agencies, and by the Montana Department of State Lands.

The post-mining land uses will be the same as the pre-mining uses -- rangeland and wildlife habitat. The contours after mining will approximate the original contours, even though there will be a deficit of overburden after removal of an 81-foot-thick coal seam, according to the plan.

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The company anticipates that peak employment will be about 480 workers during the construction period beginning early in 1980, and that permanent employment will stabilize at 250 in the fourth mining year.

The mine was the subject of a site-specific environmental impact statement filed in final form with the Environmental Protection Agency on February 28, 1979.

In addition, an environmental assessment report on this site was completed by the Office of Surface Mining. The report stated: "Based on the environmental assessment and on analyses of the existing EIS and the Spring Creek mining and reclamation plan, the Regional Director of OSM, Region V (Donald Crane), has found that no additional EIS on the Spring Creek mining and reclamation plan is required to address the impacts that this assessment has discussed."

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